

# Why Fast?

By

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Hamidullah is an eminent Scholar. Born in 1326 H. [1908 CE] in Hyderabad, India, he obtained MA, L.L.B in International Islamic Law from Osmania University, Hyderabad.

In 1935, he received his Ph.D. from Bonn University, Germany and his D.Litt. from Sorbonne University, Paris in 1936.

He has translated the Qur'an in three languages, English, German and French. The French translation is currently in its 20th edition.

He has written over 1000 articles and 174 books in 7 languages. The Battlefields of the Prophet, First Written Constitution of the World, The Biography of the Prophet among others.

He was a professor in Osmania University,6 worked as a Researcher in Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, and visiting professor in University of Istanbul.

In addition to significant works and research papers in Arabic, Urdu, Turkish, French, English and German, Dr. Hamidullah has edited several classical manuscripts of major academic significance.

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This is an attempt to study Fasting in Islam from both spiritual and temporal points of view,

Various editions have been published in the past and now opportunity is taken to revise the text.

Our thanks to Farhath Irfan and Nadia Ahmed for their help in this revised American Edition,

From us the effort, from God the enabling power.. Praise be to Him, first and last.

For the Editorial Board



Muhammad Hamidullah

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**A**ll Civilizations of old and all religions, have enjoined upon its adherents some days of fasting every year. Why did they do so? Was that a mere superstition, or had it some utility?

We are living in an age when education is available to every citizen, rich or poor, and when there is no compulsion on the part of our governments to practice any of our spiritual duties. Therefore it may be worthwhile to study whether this antique duty of fasting is still in the interest of society. Such an objective study is incumbent on a Muslim, the more so since not only reason requires it, but the Qur'an - the basis of Islam - enjoins it.

In fact there is not a single spiritual duty imposed by the Qur'an which is not accompanied by an appeal to reason, to meditate, to think, and ponder in order to be sure that it is in our own interest.

Again and again the Qur'an exhorts us not to follow blindly, the customs of our forefathers, but to think independently, so that we may rightfully be able individually and personally to be responsible for our actions.

People must not act merely on instinct as ordinary animals, but deliberately, befitting the reason which God has given human beings to the exclusion of other animals.

We must also not create mystifying mysteries, separating reason from religion and believing merely for the sake of believing with no real convictions.

No doubt there are differences of temperament among individuals, and all of us do not aspire to the same thing. The worldly-wise, before embarking on an enterprise, ascertain whether there is any material utility in the object. A pious hermit on the other hand seeks only the spiritual benefits and salvation in the Hereafter, giving up the material gain without the least compulsion on the part of anybody.

The number of extremists of both these categories is, however, very limited. The overwhelming majority of human beings in any part of the world aspire to well-being both in the Hereafter as well as in their worldly life.

Islam is conspicuous in catering to the needs of mankind in this double need and the Qur'an praises those who pray to God *"Give us in this world that which is good and in the Hereafter that which is good, and save us from the torment of the Fire."*<sup>1</sup>

Fasting as a duty is imposed by the Qur'an, which encourages us to aspire for well-being, both now and in the Hereafter, it is up to us to seek and find out what is this - worldly good and what is the other - worldly good in fasting as prescribed by the Qur'an.

Human beings are composed neither of body nor of spirit alone, but of both; and any one-sided pursuit will upset the equilibrium. The real interest of mankind requires a harmonious blending of body and soul and co-ordination between the two.

If we work solely for the benefit of the spirit, we may become angels and even surpass them; but God has already created angels, and has no need to add to their numbers.

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<sup>1</sup> Surah 2, Verse 210

Similarly, if our entire energy is spent for the material welfare and selfish self-interest, we may become beasts and devils and even surpass them. God has already created other beings for that purpose and by our becoming beasts and devils, we are only undoing the purpose of the creation of human beings who have been endowed with capacities for both spiritual and material achievements, and also with reason to distinguish and discriminate between good and evil.

Let us, therefore, develop and harmoniously co-ordinate all the talents God has given us.

Before trying to find out the underlying principles of fasting, let us know the precise terms of the Holy Qur'an in which this order to fast has been given:

### Fasting and the Qur'an

This is what the Qur'an says about the fast:

*"O you who believe! Observing the Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you - that you may ward off evil - for a certain number of days. But if any of you is ill, or on a journey, same number (should be made up) from other days; and as for those who can afford it there is a ransom: the feeding of a man in need; but who does good of his own accord, it is better for him: and that you fast is better for you if only you know.*

*The month of Ramadhan is the one in which was revealed the Qur'an, as a guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of guidance, and the Criterion (of right and wrong). Therefore whosoever of you is present, let*



*him fast the month; and whosoever of you is sick or on a journey, (let him fast the same) number of other days. God intends for you, ease; and He does not want to make things difficult for you; (He wants that you) must complete the same number (of days), and that you must magnify God for having guided you, so that you may be grateful to Him".<sup>2</sup>*

In the beginning of the verse, it is stated that fasting is prescribed in other religions also. Let us see what other religions say about it. A comparison with Islam will not be without interest.

### Fasting in other Religions

Islam is the same religion as was repeatedly revealed to mankind by the intermediary of successive Prophets, peace and blessings of Allah be upon them, the main duty of Islam being to revive the eternal truth and to purge it from later additions, not originating from the prophet who had received the Divine guidance to guide his people.

### Sabeism

Ibrahim (Abraham), peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was sent as a prophet to the Sabeans of Harran who observed a fast of 30 days without food and drink, from dawn to sunset in honor of the moon .

The Qur'an has ordered us to worship neither the sun nor the moon, but the Creator alone Who has created both; and it has prescribed the

<sup>2</sup> Surah 2, Verse 183-185

fasting of a whole month which is the restoration of Hanifism, the true religion of the Prophet Abraham, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him.

## Hinduism

Among the Hindus of India, fasting is considered to be meritorious, though not obligatory, on auspicious occasions, like the eclipse of the sun, birthday of some founder of their religion and other significant days. To break the fast, they take the meal in the afternoon.

## Judaism

The pious among the Jews fast every Thursday and Monday, and affirm that Moses peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, went to Mount Sinai on Thursday and returned on Monday . Islam has also ordained fasting on Thursdays and Mondays as a meritorious act, which is not obligatory.

The Jews also fast for 24 hours, in memory of deliverance from the Pharaoh, on the 10th of the month of Tishri. On the day of this fast, called Yom Kippur, the Jews say the prayer, "O God, You have sanctified this day in memory of the exodus from Egypt."

The Muslims, too, fast a supererogatory fast on the 10th of the month of Muharram, called aashoora, which dates from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, himself and has nothing to do with the murder of his grandson, Imam Hussain.

Of course, 24 hours were too great a hardship and a moderation was prescribed - from dawn to sunset - so that a larger number of the Muslims may be able to observe it.

## Christianity

The early Christians observed Lent during which they fasted for 40 days, excluding Sundays in a six week period, i.e. 34 days were devoted to fasting and penitence in the wilderness<sup>3</sup> in commemoration of Jesus, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, and they thought that this represented the tenth of the whole year. As a religious tax they paid a tithe in property and also a tax on food and drink!

Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, has said, *"There is a tax on everything, tax of the body being the fast."*<sup>4</sup>

He has also said, *"Whoever fasts the whole month of Ramadhan and additional six days of the succeeding month, Shawwal; it is as if someone fasts for the whole year."*<sup>5</sup>

That also makes 36 days. And the Qur'an says: *"Those who do a good deed will receive tenfold the reward."*<sup>6</sup> Thus one month will be equal to ten months; and six days equal to sixty days, i.e. two months.

The lunar month has 29 or 30 days, and the lunar year has about 355 days. If we fast one year  $29+6=35$  days, and in another year  $30+6=36$  days, the tenfold, alternately, will be 350 and 360 days, the average being 355 days.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Encyclopedia of Religions and Ethics, Vol V., p. 769

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Majah, No. 1245

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Abu Dawud, 14/58

<sup>6</sup> Surah 6, Verse 161 [pickthall]

This covers, in fact, the whole lunar year of the Muslims; and not exactly so by the Christians, who follow the solar year which is always of more than 340 days obtained by the tenfold of the Lent.

That would do for proving the fast as it is described in the Holy Qur'an. It exists also in the Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and other religions, but apparently nowhere masses observe it as the Muslims do.

Another curious point in the text of the Qur'an, referring the fast, is the apparent tone of the uncertainty: *"that you may ward off evil ...peradventure you may be thankful."*

Why this hesitation, and why not an assertion that it is so? This is a particularity of the style of the Qur'an and is repeated many times. It implies at least two things: the Omnipotence of God, Who would do what He likes; and that even by our worship He is not obliged to render us what we aspire to have.

It also implies the freedom of choice: God teaches through the Qur'an; but to learn or not to learn depends on the individual man.

The argument in the text in question - about the effects of fasting - may render some readers or listeners, God-fearing, others will continue to remain obstinate.

The other instance in the same text, about thankfulness, may imply several things: that the real thankfulness does not depend on the outer aspect of fasting and the abstaining from food and drink.

Fasting should also be stripped of ostentation and other evils. It is not the only method of testifying our thankfulness to God. There are other ways all of which are to be scrupulously observed in order to be really

grateful to God and really accomplish the duty of being thankful to our Lord.

Another interesting point is the constant care taken by Islamic Law to provide facilities. Not only to the sick, but also the those on journeys, there is a concession, that they need not fast in the month of Ramadhan, but at some other more feasible occasion.

Our fasting is not in the interest of God, but in our own interest. Forcing the sick to fast may cause aggravation of sickness if not actual premature death. Islam is not hard and harsh, but indulgent. That is why a greater percentage of its followers observe its directions than in other faiths.

### Kinds of fasts

Sometimes the fasting is obligatory on every adult, man and woman, such as during the month of Ramadhan. Sometimes, it is obligatory on sinners only, as a penitence and expiation, for instance on violation of an oath constrained by circumstances.

At times it is only meritorious, supererogatory, not causing a sin for those who do not fast on that occasion such as the six days of *Shauwal*.

Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, has forbidden fasting on certain occasions, for instance, on the two annual Eid days (On the first of *Shauwal* and on the tenth of *Dhul-Hijjah*).

The Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, has also ordered that Muslims should not fast, even voluntarily, for long periods, saying: *"You have duties to fulfil even with regard to yourselves."*<sup>7</sup>

Our body does not belong to us, but to God; and is confided to our care, and we are responsible for its well-being.

Among Christians, a distinction has been made between the clergy and the laymen. The priests and monks probably fast even now, but laymen are practically exempt: whoever works need not fast, regardless of the nature of his work, a student, a teacher, a laborer, or a merchant are all exempt.

Among the Jews the rigor of one long fast of 24 hours seems to be responsible for the fact that only very religious persons observe it annually.

### Epoch of Fasting

Jews, Christians and Hindus have a solar year, or a lunar calendar with intercalation, so that the time of fasting comes always in the same season.

Muslims follow a purely lunar calendar, and so the month of fasting, Ramadhan, rotates gradually in all the seasons of the year.

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<sup>7</sup> Sahih Bukhari 30/55

The planet on which we live does not have the same climate everywhere. Human beings suffer from excess heat or cold. The seasons of heat and cold are only relative from region to region.

The winter is a pleasant season in Mecca, but not near the poles (in Canada, Northern Europe). Summer is the best season near the poles, but not near the equator and in the sandy deserts.

Spring may be midway, but many countries near the equator do not know it, and experience only three seasons: winter, summer and rains.

For a world-wide religion, if we fix some season, it will be either perpetual ease for some and perpetual hardship for others, or inconvenient for the inhabitants of certain regions of the earth. But if seasons are alternate, then nobody will begrudge the Law-giver.

The change of seasons, for fasting, means that a person becomes accustomed to fast in all sorts of seasons. And this capacity to abstain from food and drink, both in the cold winter and the burning summer, gives the faithful an endurance power which serves well in the adversity like the siege of a war or during the scarcity of food and water.

Seasons are not alike everywhere at the same moment. In January, in certain parts of France it is minus 40° cold, and at the same time 40° of heat in Argentina!

The seasons above and below the equator differ also. When it is winter in the Northern hemisphere, it is summer in the Southern one.

If Islam had ordered a fast, say in January of every year, it will be perpetually in winter for some Muslims and in summer for others. Or, if Islam had ordered a fast, in winter, some will fast in January, others in July.



This will cause perpetual hardship to some regions and also absence of uniformity. Having fasted Paris for 29 days in January, I shall land after a few hours of flight in South Africa, and to my bewilderment no mosque there will be preparing for the Eid festival, for it will not be the fasting season there.

Again, I can simply avoid all fasting. At the end of December I shall leave Paris and pass a month in South Africa (where January will not be the fasting month, in February I shall return to Paris and quietly disregard the fast in July (which would exist in South Africa and South American, but not in the Northern hemisphere where Paris is situated).

A worldwide community cannot follow a fasting according to the solar year without hardship to its followers. Fasting according to solar years is all right for regional religions, although they miss the advantage of the exercise of fasting in different seasons.

A lunar calendar seems therefore the most reasonable and best suited to the interest of society, and the only practicable solution of the problem for a world wide community.

### Sense of Fasting

Islam aspires to the well-being of man in both the worlds, with all that they imply. The next world is intended, according to the Islamic notions, for the judgement of each and every individual on the basis of what he has accomplished in the present world; the successful and the happy will be those who will obtain there, the pleasure of God. As to the



present world, man being constituted both of body and soul, the spiritual and material effects of the fast will concern us in this study.

### Importance of Motive and Intention

Everybody knows that a voluntary murder is abhorred by all civilizations, and that all religions condemn such a murderer to Hell, while the innocent victim merits Paradise.

The defense of a rightful cause against an aggressor is a duty, and the one who kills an aggressor is considered to be a hero who merits all the rewards here as well as in the Hereafter.

Is not the difference between these two killings of merely the intention?

Similarly, if one abstains from eating and drinking only on the prescription of a doctor, will he not be doing the same act as the one who gives up eating and drinking in compliance with the command and for the sake of God?

God is our Creator and our Lawgiver, who is going to revive us after death and to demand accounts of our actions in the present world. Whoever will have obeyed Him, shall obtain His pleasure, even if we have not understood the underlying secrets of His commandment.

The fasting enjoined by a religion, by a revealed law must entail Divine pleasure if we accomplish it. And what spiritual and that-worldly

benefit can be greater than the eternal pleasure of the Lord? Material motives, ostentation and such things, will mar the purity of the intention.

Let our fast be solely for the pleasure, and in compliance with the commands, of God. Hence the celebrated saying of the Holy Prophet: "The acts are judged but by their intentions".<sup>8</sup>

### Spiritual aspects

Experience shows that a blind person has generally a stronger memory, and certain of his sense are more developed than those of an ordinary man who has his eyes. In other words, if certain faculties are not utilized, they may strengthen some other faculties. Similar is the relation of body and soul. In weakening the body there is strengthening of the soul (spirit), even as the trimming of the branches of a tree procures more flowers and more fruits.

When someone fasts, his conscience pricks him in the face of evil deeds, and he is the more able to resist temptations. Further, the fast makes him think of God more, develops his inclination for charity, makes him taste the sweetness of the obedience to the Lord.

God Almighty has created man according to His own image<sup>9</sup>, as Bukhari and Muslim have reported that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said.

<sup>8</sup> Sahih Bukhari 1/1

<sup>9</sup> This, of course, must be interpreted in line with the Islamic conception of Divinity as enunciated by the Qur'anic text: "*there is nothing like Him*," (Qur'an, Surah 42, Verse 11).

The Qur'an says: *"And we take our color from God, and who is better than God at coloring."*<sup>10</sup> Let us therefore try to betake to the Divine color.

One of the attributes of God, as mentioned in the Qur'an is : *".....Who feeds and is never fed...."*<sup>11</sup> When someone fasts, this Divine attribute reflects in him: abstaining oneself from personal needs and doing charity to others, feeding the poor, helping the miserable and similar acts create in man a feeling of celestial qualities, which can be felt by everyone doing the same 'experiment', but cannot be described.

Again, in his weakness man sometimes commits sins, but later on his conscience may convince him that he has done a wrong, and he repents. All crimes have a corresponding punishment, be they crimes of body or soul, civil or spiritual.

It is also an experience that when the sinner tortures himself in repentance, he gets a consolation in proportion to his repentance, couples with possible reparation of the wrong.

Destruction of the self excluded, what pain and what torture can afflict man more than the privation of the essential of existence, food and drink?

Waliullah ad-Dihlawi was a 18th century Islamic scholar and mystic. He has left us many valuable works on the philosophy of Islam.

In his celebrated work Hujjatallah al-Balighah<sup>12</sup>, remarking on the spiritual aspects of Fasting, he writes in Arabic and we translate:

<sup>10</sup> Surah 2, Verse 138

<sup>11</sup> Surah 6, Verse 14

<sup>12</sup> Vol 2, p. 36 "on fasting"

Since the excess of animality hinders the emergence of the angelic aspects, it was necessary that one should try to dominate one's animality.

Since the excess of animality and the accumulation and abundance of its stratas have their origin in food, drink and indulgence in carnal pleasures, fasting accomplishes what abundant food cannot. Therefore the method of dominating the animality is the diminishing of the causes (of the excess of animality).

That is why there is unity among all those who desire the emergence of the angelic aspects in man, to diminish and reduce these (eating, drinking, etc).

There is no difference in this prescription among the peoples of the world in spite of the differences in their religions and distance between their respective countries.

Moreover the ultimate goal is that the animality of man should become submissive to man's angelic side, so that his animality acts according to the inspirations and dictates of his angelism, and takes color from its color; and his angelism prevents his animality from taking mean and lowly colors and getting object impression - like a wax getting the impression of a seal.

To attain this, there is no method other than this: the angelic side of man should select something according to its own exigencies and should inspire and suggest this to the animal side of man; and that the animality should submit to this inspiration and not act obstinately or rebel against it.

Angelism should continue to inspire its requirements to the animality, and the animality should continue to submit to these requirements, so that it becomes accustomed to them and proficient in them.

The requirements which the angelism imposes and which the animality enforces willy-nilly, belong either

- *To the category of things which expand (delight) the angelic side and contract (depress) the animal one, such as the effort to resemble - so to say - the world of God's super-Kingdom (malakut) and to regard (meditate) His super-domination (jabarut), which is exclusive to angelism, the animality being away, far away from it:*
- *or to the giving up of things which are the requirements of the animality, whereby it is delighted, and whereto it craves in its extravagance.*

It is this latter category which constitutes the fasting.

The virtues of fasting are numerous, and many a saying of the Holy Prophet peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, has referred to them. Perhaps it is not necessary to go into details. Suffice to mention that the minimum and lowest grade of fasting is to abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and carnal desires from dawn to sunset.

The more elevated degree is to abstain from all acts, words and thoughts of carnal, bestial or diabolic nature. Otherwise there is no difference between a Fast and to be starving with no spiritual significance whatsoever. What a great difference between the two!

**Material Aspects**

Students learn for several months continuously, then they get summer vacations. Employees work for six days of the week, the seventh day being a holiday for leisure and rest.

Men exert mental and physical energy the whole day and the repose of sleep renovates their faculties for the next day. Even machines and tools require relaxation, and we observe this for motor cars, aeroplanes, locomotives, etc.

Is it therefore not reasonable to think that the stomach and the digestive organs also require rest? In fact modern medicine has also reached the same conclusion, and a large number of doctors in Switzerland, Germany, etc. prescribe, for various chronic diseases, forced hunger and thirst for longer or shorter periods according to the needs of the sickness and the physical capacities of the sick person. They have also found that various glands secrete certain acids in the stomach on account of hunger and thirst, and that these acids kill many a germ which produce different diseases. Statistics have also shown that several digestive and other diseases are less abundant among people who have the habit of fasting every year.

People require a change of climate, air and water from time to time. Doctors sent the person recovering from sickness for convalescence to a place other than his habitual living place. The more fortunate among the Westerners pass a month of summer vacations outside their home.

It is necessary to change the normal habits from time to time. This is also a kind of rest. We see, for instance, that cultivators use their fields alternatively and give "rest" to the ground also. Continuousness being harmful, Islam has forbidden the fasting during the whole year, even for those who want spiritual benefits thereby.

Experience has also shown that if one fasts forever, it becomes a habit, a second nature and therefore such a person does not profit by it as does the one who fasts with intervals. In fact, if one fasts for more than 40 days consecutively, it becomes a habit; and if one fasts for less than a month, it has not much effect.

There are even great military advantages from the habit of fasting, for the soldier sometimes does not get food or drink, and still he has to fight during the whole day and even late into the night. One who has the habit of fasting the whole month (of Ramadhan) and of the additional prayers of tarawih during the night gets naturally greater aptitude for the said emergencies that the soldier who does not undergo these 'exercises'.

Even in our daily civil life we may profit by the habitude of the practice of fasting, in case of strikes which are getting more and more common, say of the employees of waterworks, merchants of food-stuff and the like. Even curfew orders for 24 and more hours are no more unknown.

We know that Napoleon was jealous of the Turkish army for its endurance capacities to continue to fight without food and drink. I have heard that a sort of fasting is required in the German army for the same purpose.

Even the nature outside human beings teaches us many things. Scientists observing nature have seen that far from weakening the body, Fasting rejuvenates and invigorates the body.



Everybody can see that plants "fast" in winter, losing completely their foliage, neither eating nor drinking for long months; and the approach of spring brings them flowers, fruits and new leaves, and also an astonishingly youthful appearance.

The same is true of wild beasts and birds which when snow covers the soil, find absolutely nothing to eat; they pass long months in hibernation without food or drink, and when they break their "fast" at the end of winter, the hides of the animals and the feathers of the birds are renewed beyond recognition, and their "fast" makes them youthful, more vigorous than before their annual "fast".

To terminate this discussion, those who fast on medical prescription or even under compulsion - as a discipline or else - do get the material benefits inherent in fasting; but there being no intention of a spiritual search, they do not benefit thereby spiritually.

Muslims fast with the intention of complying with the order of God. They therefore have a piety and its reward; and at the same time they do not lose the physical and material benefits of the fasting.

In short from which ever point of view one may study the Muslim way of fasting, it compares favorable with its counterparts in other civilizations.

### Some Practical Details about the Islamic Fast

We have already referred to the fact that the Qur'an ordains the fast during the whole month of Ramadhan. Of course this is a month of the



Hijrah calendar observed among the Muslims since the time of the Holy Prophet peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. It is the 9th month of the year.

The Hijrah year is based on a calendar which is purely lunar. Every month begins with the appearance on the horizon at sun-set of the new moon, which phenomenon repeats itself every 29 or 30 days. That makes a year of 354 or 355 days in the round figures. The Christian year is a solar one, and following the Gregorian calculations is normally of 365 days. The result is that the month of Ramadan begins every year about 11 days in advance of the preceding one.

Supposing the

1st of Ramadhan

corresponds to

1405	H.	21	May	1985
1406	H.	11	May	1986
1407	H.	30	April	1987
1408	H.	19	April	1988
1409	H.	8	April	1989
1410	H.	29	March	1990

and so on and so forth.

However there may be a difference of one day between the countries of the East and the West, since all depends on the formation and birth of the moon and its appearance, on the horizon of a country just at sun-set.

Since the moon forms in the course of its revolution round the earth, if that does not take place before the appointed time, the new month begins a day later.

Since nature itself does not intend uniformity, Islam does not require that all Muslims of the world should start on the same day, much less to begin the fast at the same moment.

In fact if it is a day in Switzerland, it will be night in America, and vice-versa, every 1000 miles making the difference of about one hour.

Owing to similar reasons, the month of Ramadhan falls turn by turn in all the seasons of the year. If it is winter in the countries above the equator, at the same moment it will be summer in the countries below the equator. If the lengths of the day and the night are practically always alike on and near the equator, it is not so near the poles.

The abnormal conditions, in Northern Europe and Canada have required special solutions and the theologians have found them.

### Method of Fasting

The fast means the formation of the intent of the act and abstaining from eating and drinking from dawn (about 1 ½ hour before sun-rise) to sun-set.

Between sun-set and dawn there is no restriction on fulfillment of our normal needs and desires (and obviously one cannot eat and drink all the night through). Even family life is not forbidden.

The recommendation of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, has been that one should take a normal dinner (called iftar) at sun-set, and another light meal just before the dawn (called sahur).

Just as for beginning the fast, an intention is to be formulated for breaking the it at sun-set. The Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, is reported to have said upon breaking his fast: *"O God, for You have I fasted, in You have I believed, and with Your nourishment do I break the fast."*

It may happen that through forgetfulness one may eat or drink, involuntarily. That does not affect the validity of the fast of that day. As soon as one recalls that it is a fasting day, one should give up food, drink, smoking, etc.

During the course of the fast, bathing has no adverse effect; it is even recommended for the Friday prayer. While making ablutions, one must rinse the mouth with water. Its moisture also does not violate the fast.

Minors are exempt form fasting. The infirm (physically weak because of age) if rich, should instead feed a poor man for each day of the fast.

Apart from that, every adult Muslim has the religious obligation to fast during the whole month of Ramadhan. The sick and the traveler are allowed to postpone the fast, until a more convenient time. Women must not fast during menstruation, which period they have to replace afterwards.

Normally the fast should not affect the daily lifestyle and it should not be a pretext for neglecting any duties.

Islam does not approve of keeping vigil during the whole night and passing the day after in sleep and indolence.

Fasting in Islam means a greater effort to perform all the usual duties and more - more prayers and more charity - and all this in the absence of food and drink.

The first revelation of the Qur'an came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, in the month of Ramadhan; so it is befitting that one spends more time, while fasting, to study the whole Qur'an.

For those who do not know Arabic, there are translations available in practically all the important languages of the world. The translation by an orthodox and pious Muslim has greater chance of being faithful.

If possible, one should complete the reading of the whole text at least once in the course of this month.

At the end of the fasting month, there is a grand festival, on the first day of the month Shauwal. Early in the morning a special congregational prayer is offered, followed by a sermon by the imam. As it is the end of the fasting month, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, has recommended that people should take their breakfast before going to the place where the congregational prayer is offered.

It is also a religious duty of the Muslims to provide food on that day for the poor. In classical times not only dates, dried grapes, and similar things were distributed for this purpose, but even uncooked wheat and rice by all individuals.

The great *muhaddith*(traditionist) Abu Ubaid of the third century of the Hijrah approvingly records in his *Kitab al-Amwal*, that in his time this fitrah charity on the Ramadhan feast was given not only to Muslims but even to Christian monks.

The idea is that on the day of Muslim festivity all, even if they are not Muslim, should rejoice.

Why not since the Qur'an exhorts us to collaborate in matters of charity and piety even with non-Muslim enemies.<sup>13</sup>

Says God: *"For every act of charity I have prescribed a reward (according to the sincerity in its accomplishments) from ten to seven hundred times its worth, fasting excepted, which is for Me and I shall recompense it Myself, since one gives up his desire and food for only My sake."*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Surah 5, Verse 2

<sup>14</sup> Hadith Qudsi, cited by Ibn Majah, No. 1638

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Its only available version on [scribd.com](https://www.scribd.com) was incomplete and many pages were missing. We have added those pages and now presenting complete booklet with new get-up and in searchable format.

Remember us in your prayers.

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